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A SAFE FOURTH FOR THE CHILDREN

A radio talk by Mrs. Rowena Schmidt Carpenter, assistant to the chief, Bureau of Home Economics, delivered through WRC and 34 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, June 27, 1930.

HOW DO YOU DO, HOMEMAKERS!

If you have noticed how I like to feature special days in our chats, you will not be surprised that I am about to make a plea for a safe and sane Fourth for the children. Independence Day! I am afraid that this patriotic holiday means to many of us only excitement, noise, and fireworks. We seem to have lost track of what we are celebrating, and meanwhile our method of being gay has developed into a rather riotous performance that causes many injuries, many deaths, and tremendous damage to property. Do you think I exaggerate? It may seem so if you are fortunate enough to have escaped accidents and fires in your own family and neighborhood. And yet the figures that have been collected tell a very serious story. Did you know, for instance, that more Americans have lost their lives celebrating our signing of the Declaration of Independence than were killed in the Revolutionary War? It is fine to commemorate the beginning of our national liberty by a celebration, but too bad to endanger lives while doing so. And yet fatal accidents are not the only serious results of Independence Day festivities. Records show nearly 2½ times as many injuries as fatalities, over a period of 14 years, and many of these injuries caused much suffering and even permanent disability. Often it is the favorite firecracker or the so-called "harmless" sparkler that does the damage. So you see why I am making a plea for a safe and sane Fourth.

Last year the National Safety Council listed the chief causes of Fourth of July accidents to children. As I talk to you about some of these causes just notice how common place they are, and how important it is, therefore, for us to protect our children by ordinary safety precautions. First there are "Injuries by explosions," from fireworks, powder, dynamite, guns and even toy pistols. So often these injuries happen when the child picks up and examines some firework that does not "go off" right away after it is lighted. Even a small explosion may injure an eye, a finger, or cause a bad burn. Some of the burns that seem slight at the time result in lockjaw later. Such burns are caused by powder from fireworks. Going down the list we find "Poisoning by sparklers" which may happen when children put sparklers in their mouths. "Clothing set on fire." "Children run over by automobiles, often when excited by fireworks." "Drowning when wading or swimming in strange pools, as a part of a fourth of July celebration." And so on.

Fortunately during the last quarter of a century much has been done by the American Medical Association, the National Safety Council, insurance companies, and various organizations interested in civic welfare to prevent dangerous celebrations, to encourage civic or large group displays of fireworks, to restrict in many cities the sale of fireworks for private use, and to warn parents of the dangers to children in the handling of what are called "harmless" explosives.

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So let me urge you as parents to face this problem squarely and decide what you will do with your family to celebrate the Fourth. If you live in a community where the sale of fireworks is illegal or is controlled by certain restrictions, of course your duty is clearly defined: you and your children will perhaps have a picnic, and later if there is a public display of fireworks you will let the children stay up for it.

If in your community there is no legal restriction on holiday explosives and you are willing to have a private celebration, you will supervise not only the purchase but the lighting as well of the fireworks. Children must be taught how to handle even the simplest of explosives. They must be warned never under any circumstances to pick up fireworks that have been lighted even a long time before. They must be taught that stunts such as standing near a cannon cracker about to go off, or putting a hand in the fire whirling from a pin wheel are not smart or courageous, but silly and foolhardy because of the dangers. It is a strange thing that children who, as a rule, are not allowed to handle matches, play with fire or run carelessly into the street, may do any or all of these on the 4th of July. The bars are down somehow, and so it is no wonder that disasters result. I honestly wonder whether we grown-ups who do not protect children from dangerous celebration of the Fourth are not guilty of wanting the noise and excitement ourselves, and so we sort of use the children as a blind. Haven't you heard or have you said yourself, "What a tame day for the Fourth of July?" Maybe the first thing we as parents should do is to examine our own ideas to see if we are safe and sane parents on Independence Day. If we are, we will actively supervise the lighting of any fireworks we allow our children to have, and will use this national holiday to teach a few lessons in safety first and in patriotism, reminding the new generation what Independence Day really means.

And so I bid you Goodbye, Homemakers, wishing you a glorious, though sane, Fourth.

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